STEVER ROBBINS:	Stever Robbins here. Welcome to the Get-It-Done, Guys Quick and Dirty Tips To Work Less and Do More. Today's topic is how to focus at your computer. The quick and dirty tip is to plan ahead and don't multitask.

I've received several listener questions about how to stay focused at your computer. Harold, Heather, Devin, Corrigan, and Alejandra, to name a few. Harold put it best, "I have a staggering amount of work that needs to be done at my computer. I often find myself with a few minutes to spare and I gravitate toward my computer since I have so much work to do there. But then I sit down, check my email, check a few websites that I check regularly, and then before I get any real work done, I'm out of time."

Ah, Harold. The computer is the most complex device ever made. Isn't that impressive? It's a camera. No, it's a stereo. No, it's a game. No, it's a typewriter, a calculator, a newspaper, a TV, it's my friend. We talk, we play together. I don't need anyone else in the whole wide world. And that is precisely the problem.

The computer comes chock full of its very own distractions. And it entices us to lose the separation between work and play. It's a giant mash up of everything. Kind of like all in one baby food, for adults. Separation decreased distraction. When tools were separate, we had to move from task to task physically.

Listeners under 25 won't believe this, but it's true. To type a paper, we pulled our chair over to a thing called a typewriter. When we typed a wrong letter, we went to the supply desk, got out a little bottle of white paint called correction fluid, and deleted the letter by painting over it, by hand. Then, we'd blow on it and wait for it to dry. Spell check was handled by a dictionary, a book made out of paper, which sat five feet away, on our bookshelf.

To talk to a friend, we didn't have cell phones, we had telephones. And they were connected to the wall by a wire. We had to move to the telephone and talk there. We sent messages by mail. No E. And paid $0.39 a piece to send them. They would arrive two days later.

Our TV was in the next room and so was the newspaper. You get the idea. This was prehistory, say 1995. Since tasks got done in different separate places, moving between tasks made us move physically. Not only was this a handy way to burn calories, we all looked like Greek gods and goddesses back in the good old days. But it made it expensive to switch

activities. When distracting yourself takes more work than staying on task, the lazy path is to focus.

Separate your activities and space. One way to stay focused at your computer, is to return to the days when we were all Greek god persons. Find ways to impose separation between your tasks. These all require a bit of mental discipline. If you're having trouble, join my next action day, a link will be in this episode's transcript. And use it to start training yourself.

Unplug your internet connection. You're not allowed to plug it in until tomorrow morning. Since most distractions are internet related, this will force you to find some other way to use your time. Like, say, work. Plan your computer usage. If possible, rearrange your office so your computer is far from your support materials. Before stepping over to the computer, write down on a sticky pad exactly what the task is you're going to your computer to do. Be specific and limit each activity so you know when you're done.

Write one page of today's report. Research three models of car to buy. Manipulate public opinion by spreading rumors about politicians I dislike for 15 minutes. And so on. Put the sticky note on the screen to remind you. Writing the task out forces you to be real with yourself. You're allowed to play, just be honest. Write, "read three meaningless blogs and indulge in '10 minutes of narcissistic twittering with my so-called followers." Then step away from the computer back to your desk the moment the task is done.

Even if you can't move your computer, you can still plan your computer time. Just turn your chair away from the computer when you've met your goal. Separate your activities in time. Exit your applications when you're done using them. If you leave applications open at all times, shut them down completely when you're done using them and don't open multiple documents at once or multiple tabs in your browser.

But it takes so long to launch them, you squeal in protest. Yes, it does. That's the point. It turns an idle distraction into a conscious act of will. Besides, if you keep something open in the background, you'll actually see it there and be reminded of its tempting goodness. Kind of like trying to diet with a big jar of delicious Hershey's dark chocolate kisses wrapped in shiny, glittery foil nestled lovingly inside a candy dish on your desk.

You can also put applications, like your web browser, multimedia player, and instant messenger you're inside a folder called "Potential Time Wasters." Then every time you go to

launch one, you'll have to click through the folder name and be reminded.

Conventional wisdom would have you do all computer related tasks at once. In a perfect world, that would work. In a world where the computer is a bigger distraction than it is a time saver, plan your day to alternate computer related tasks and non computer related tasks. That way, when you're done with your email, for example, you're forced to leave the device of distraction to run out and buy that 60 pack of Twinkies for the office Christmas party. It may only be February, but Twinkies don't really degrade.

This is Stever Robbins. Follow me on Twitter with follow get it done guy. This episode's transcript, at getitdone.quickanddirtytips.com, has a link to the action day episode. Get the get it done guy and other great shows from quick and dirty tips streamed to your iPhone. Download Stitcher free today at Stitcher.com Work less, do more, and have a great life.

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